

A Form-Focused Approach to Communication in English

English Etsuko Miyamoto

It has sometimes been argued that grammar is not important in a communicative approach to language. It may well be due to overemphasis on the communicative aspect of the approach, though it has also been argued that grammar is an essential component of 'communicative competence'. After a rough historical review of the place of grammar in a communicative approach and its problems, we will be able to recognize the importance of grammatical instruction. Considering its limited language learning environment, grammatical instruction is necessary in the formal courses at Japanese senior high schools. I will make a practical suggestion of a form-focused approach to communication, with some examples.

Key Words : Communication, Language Instruction

I

Introduction

What has made me pay attention to the grammatical aspect of language teaching is my students' occasional claims when practicing particular expressions : "They can understand me if I drop these small words like 'in, with, of...'" or "Many people speak English even though they didn't learn grammar." Most students wish to be good English speakers. 65 percent of my students surveyed two years ago answered that one of the goals of learning English is to communicate well in English, while 37 percent answered they thought it is an important part of preparing for entrance examinations. Many students hope to become good at listening and speaking, but they don't think grammar is as important as they are told. That may be

because they have heard about the criticism and ineffectiveness of the formal course of foreign languages in Japan, or they have felt from actual experience of speaking English that there may be something more important than an exact knowledge of grammar, or they just find little interest in learning grammar. Their complaints have some truth, but I find a problem in their attitudes : they separate grammar from communication and find no relation between the two. I have come to the conclusion that there are two things teachers can and should do : one is to have learners realize that the knowledge of grammatical rules is essential from the communicative point of view ; the other is to give them enjoyable communicative exercises and activities through which they can learn grammar.

1.1 What is grammar?

Grammar may be defined as "the way a

language manipulates and combines words (or bits of words) in order to form longer units of meaning," or as "a set of rules which govern how units of meaning may be constructed in any language." (Ur 1988)

There is little controversy about the definition, but what is significant here is to put it in the communicative background. It may be a fair generalization that the thing itself doesn't change but the views of or attitudes towards it change in the course of time. Sociolinguist Hymes' idea of 'communicative competence' reflected the changes in the views of and attitudes toward language, particularly toward grammar. This term extends the idea of linguistic competence which Chomsky popularized to include not only knowledge of the rules which enable a speaker to distinguish grammatical from ungrammatical sentences, but also the rules that determine appropriate use of the language in living situations. Canale's concept of four forms of competence represents the present consensus towards communicative competence. He called them grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. He stated, "There is no strong theoretical or empirical motivation for the view that grammatical competence is any more or less crucial to successful communication than is sociolinguistic competence or strategic competence. The primary goal of a communicative approach must be to facilitate the integration of these types of knowledge for the learner, an outcome that is not likely

to result from overemphasis on one form of competence over the others throughout a second language programme." (Canale and Swain 1980)

Fundamentally, the function of communication is to convey information through which various purposes will be achieved, as Speech Act Theory suggests, and which always influences building human relationships. Suppose you leave a message on the answering machine of your client. You may be able to get a call back if you say, "Nancy Smith at NEC. Call me," but you might lose the client. You may not be familiar with the expression : "Could you please call me back?" or you may know it but lack the knowledge of expressions appropriate to the situation. In general, as a learner gets more advanced, he/she is expected to have a more accurate understanding of proper expressions, in other words, to be a 'sophisticated' language user. 'Sophistication' involves development of the four forms of competence.

1.2 Why has grammar been considered less important?

It is sometimes argued that grammar is not important in a communicative approach to language. It may well be due to overemphasis on the communicative aspect of its concepts and principles. The linguistic theory supporting the Natural Approach contributed to the trend. In order to overview how this happened, let us put our discussion into a historical perspective and review some of the important characteristics.

In 1972 Hymes proposed the idea of 'communicative competence.' He suggested that exact knowledge of grammatical rules alone didn't lead to good language performance. Communicative Language Teaching influenced language teachers widely. They accepted the new style in response to the deadening effects of the traditional grammar-oriented approach. CLT appeared in the situation in which Audio-Lingual Habit Theory and Cognitive Code Learning Theory had been opposed to each other, both of which didn't take actual language use into consideration. The Habit Theory was especially attacked for its mechanical language manipulation and for not providing learners opportunities to choose language and express themselves. Since 1980s CLT has dominated language teaching.

Three chief characteristics of CLT demonstrate the place of grammar in the approach.

The first one is concerned with syllabus design. CLT, paying attention to the social aspect of language, that is, language use, usually has a syllabus based on the notion and/or function of language, though it must be admitted that it is not the only syllabus CLT applies. Sociolinguistics, especially functional linguistics and Speech Act Theory, contributed to the development of that syllabus. The Speech Act Theory regards communication as acts aimed to cause some effects on the relationship between the speaker and the listener by using language, and as consisting of functions of request,

suggestion, complaint, etc. What is most important is to achieve that purpose. That is why CLT places more stress on functional success than on its formal exactness. It doesn't deny grammar teaching, but pays more attention to the function of language than on its form.

The second feature is that CLT has much in common with the Natural Approach, which gains its basic idea from the process of acquisition of a first language. This approach also has the principle of placing meaning or message in communication above language form, emphasizing the learner's activity. Krashen's Monitor Model, which supports the Natural Approach, also finds only a supplementary value in formal grammar teaching. This model argues that grammar taught explicitly cannot be 'acquired' and that such 'learned' grammar is not available for spontaneous speech but works as just a monitor of the production resulting from acquired knowledge. Knowledge required for communication is acquired into the learner's internalized knowledge storage through language exposure, not by planned instruction. Grammar instruction isn't ignored in the Natural Approach, but it is placed in only a secondary position in the approach. CLT doesn't necessarily take the same view about structural knowledge, but basically thinks highly of the natural process and values learner-oriented activity.

The third feature is that the teacher is generous towards the learner's errors. There are three reasons for this attitude.

One is the contribution of the learner's errors to the learning process. Rather than seeing errors as forms to be avoided and prevented at all costs, CLT views them as useful evidence of the learner's response to his / her situation as a language learner. This does not mean that it allows the learner's mistakes to persist, but that by analysis of the errors teaching strategies will be more sensitive to learning. The second reason is the principle of placing more stress on fluency than on accuracy. In stressing grammatical accuracy the learner is prevented from obtaining fluency, which according to Krashen reflects the learner's internalized grammar. Finally, error correction must be done carefully lest it should raise the learner's affective filter. The Natural Approach, taking the learner's psyche into account, has the principle of not disturbing the learner's positive attitude or motivation by the teacher's interference. This helps to create the situation in which the learners think grammatical exactness is not important.

1.3 How is the importance of grammar instruction recognized again?

Recently attention has been drawn again to the grammatical aspect of language teaching. With the swing back of the language teaching pendulum, problems with CLT have begun to be recognized. Major problems are concerned with how to deal with grammar.

The notional/functional syllabus was criticized relatively early. Brumfit(1980)

pointed out that the notional or functional taxonomy is far less systematized than grammar and it is difficult to be designed into a syllabus, which is a way of achieving maximally efficient use of limited time and resources. Attempts to design a notional or functional syllabus don't produce any more than a list of target specifications. This argument can be ensured by the observation that the expressions classified according to functions cover only a small part of communication. This reveals what is criticized as a drawback of the notional/functional syllabus : it cannot provide systematic teaching of language form ; therefore, it is not suitable for beginners. One typical example is the expressions of requests. You have several varieties when you want to make a request. For example :

Can you help me?

Can't you come?

Won't you give him the money?

Close the door, will you?

These are not the only usage of 'can' and 'will' 'Can' is used as in "Can you use a computer?" or "I can't hear you." "Will" is used as in "Will it be fine tomorrow?" This will confuse initial learners who are not familiar with the words 'can' and 'will.' It can be concluded that notional or functional instruction is not effective as a central framework at least for beginning learners. However, the notional/functional syllabus cannot be entirely rejected. Several grammar books organized according to language function are useful in providing a new

perspective to those who have some grounding in the grammar after several years of learning English in school. It means that the target is fairly advanced learners.¹⁾

The Monitor Model is criticized for its extreme separation of acquired knowledge from learned knowledge. According to Ellis(1984), the model cannot adequately account for language-learner variability, which can be best described in terms of a continuum from 'communicative' to 'modelled' language use. Ellis concludes that primary processes activate non-analytic knowledge and are responsible for spontaneous production, and secondary processes such as monitoring which are responsible for planned discourse are not a direct help for unplanned discourse, but he recognizes the indirect contribution of the secondary processes. Secondary processes store up a body of knowledge which, although not immediately accessible in unplanned discourse, is eventually turned into the knowledge which can be activated later on by the primary processes. His modest suggestion seems to be supported by other theorists. What seems important is which processes to apply and how much of both to be mixed. It depends on the types of learners.

Aside from the linguistic theory, several disadvantages of the Natural Approach are recognized, which resort exclusively to primary processes. It is a slow process and not suitable for very beginners because they don't have enough knowledge to work with.

Another disadvantage is that there is a limit to apply this approach since its success depends on whether to obtain sufficient input.

Indeed, the teacher has to be careful about correcting the learner's errors. Avoiding direct correction may be good for beginning learners, but those more advanced often need more efficient ways. As for error analysis, it must be admitted that it certainly contributes to teaching strategies, but the learner's development of accuracy is another matter. We should not forget recent work on the contribution of error-correction to the learner's accuracy(White 1989, Takahashi 1995). It is difficult to develop accuracy and fluency at the same time, but instead of deploring the incompatibility, it would be better to agree with Brumfit(1980) and develop an instruction to aim at both accuracy and fluency from the early stage.

1) Leech, G. and Svartvik, J. 1994 A Communicative Grammar of English, Longman.
De devitiis, G. Mariani, L. and O'Malley, K. 1989 English Grammar for Communication, Longman.

1.4 How should grammar be taught?

The recent recognition of the importance of grammar instruction reflects a reaction to previous underestimation of grammar owing to overemphasis on language use. We should not forget that it aims at developing an ability to communicate more effectively, much less deny communicative approach. As mentioned earlier, there is no

doubt about the importance of the integration of the communicative components. When it comes to teaching, several problems emerge. The three social components are concerned with the inter-action between the language system and the real world. Students learning a language are going to be taught how to interact with other people, which reflects personal abilities rather than abilities related to the target language itself. Another problem is the evaluation of the interaction which depends on the community concerned, as is represented by the concept of 'cultural competence.' What and how much of it can or should be taught in the classroom? Should grammar be taught explicitly or not? If yes, how? The answer depends on three factors : the learner's objective, learning stage, and the learning environment. What is expected of teachers is to remember that grammar is one aspect of communicative competence, and to select and create material, syllabus and method to fit the particular learner or learner group.

1.5 How is grammar dealt with in formal course of language teaching at Japanese senior high schools?

The Course of Study for Foreign Languages emphasizes 'communication,' due partly to more opportunities to use English in global mass media. It also partly answers criticism against the traditional grammar-transition method. It is true that instruction is becoming increasingly communicative ; learner-oriented activities are more frequently

seen in classrooms, and the number of ALTs has been increasing to over 3,600 in 1994. It doesn't mean that grammar is neglected. Still many senior high schools use textbooks focusing on grammar learning, which seems to reflect the demand for systematic teaching of language forms. Many authorized textbooks for English I and English II , which are for an integrated study of English, mostly have grammatical items listed at the end of each chapter, but are not comprehensive enough to cover every essential item. Many Writing textbooks are organized according to topic syllabus, accompanied by grammatical, and sometimes functional, items. The organization seems to be good for those who have learned basic grammar : in the Course of Study, Writing is a required course taught to juniors and/or seniors after they have completed English I . Actually systematic grammar instruction is offered in the first year at many senior high schools.

1.6 How should systematic grammar instruction be offered?

Is systematic grammar instruction necessary in senior high school? Considering the present situation outlined above, many teachers will answer affirmatively. The next question is how should it be done? An approach I'd like to suggest is to :

- choose essential structural items and
- teach them according to a structural syllabus with a communicative method.

Let me remind you of the present conditions surrounding foreign language

teaching in Japanese senior high schools.

Language teaching in Japanese senior high schools should be offered from a communicative perspective. Since there are more opportunities of using English in real life, and over 96 percent of the population go to senior high school in this country, foreign language teaching should be aimed at developing a positive attitude to communicate in the target language. Grammar should be dealt with in this context, that is to say, it should be acquired as a means of communication. It is important to let students understand that grammar is part of communication.

The suggestion I presented above doesn't mean that every grammatical item must be taught in the suggested approach. Students learn many grammar points---explicitly and/or implicitly---through other forms of learning, mainly from reading and listening material. But it is difficult for learners to receive enough input to acquire everything in this way in the Japanese classroom, where students spend only 5-6 hours a week learning English, and they hardly use English outside the class-room. Even if they could receive sufficient input, it would be a slower process than if they took systematic structural instruction. We can expect that learners of high school age will learn language by understanding the system. It would be efficient to put basic language forms into the learner's consciousness according to a planned sequence in order to compensate for the relatively short time

spent in the class-room. Another way to compensate for limited time is the selection of items. They should be chosen from the communicative point of view : what is used frequently in spoken English? and what is important to get information across?

There are many structural items students learn for the first time in senior high school. Forms learned in junior high school should be reviewed and enumerated upon. It is more effective to learn basic structure first so that the learner can use it in a more communication-oriented syllabus later. We should not forget to teach functional aspect of the structural item at the same time. Brumfit recommends this model ; "to base a syllabus on a genuine system, like the grammatical system, and to use a list of basic functions simply as a checklist, to be integrated methodologically into the practical working out of the syllabus in teaching, would seem to be a very sensible approach to take."(1980)

As Widdowson(1984) argues, a syllabus should be structural ; it is the methodology that can be communicative. An important objective of communicative practices in structural instruction is to get the learner to absorb the structures. Communicative practices also provide opportunities to learn social aspect of language. Learners are offered conscious and unconscious learning of both aspects through repeated language use. The objectives will be aimed at on the basis of the contributions communicative activities make to language learning,

which are summarized by Littlewood(1981) ; (1) They provide 'whole-task practice' ; (2) They improve motivation ; (3) They allow natural learning ; (4) They can create a context which supports learning.

Let me ensure another crucial point : it should be offered to 1st year students so that they can enjoy more communicative activities in later years. It is efficient to move into communicative activities, where students are working without paying as much attention to structure as to meanings, after going through essential grammatical items.

II

2.1 English curriculum at Kanazawa Fuzoku

This chapter discusses the practical procedure of teaching, followed by the material I actually used in my Oral Communication B classroom this year. They are for team-teaching classes. Table 1 shows the sub-subjects of English to be studied and the number of credits at Kanazawa Fuzoku Senior High School.

table 1

	1 st Year	2 nd Year	3 rd Year
English I	3		
English II		2	2
Oral Communication B	2		
Reading		2	2
Writing		2	2

In addition, 1st year students are required once a week to take an integrated subject, 'Universal Culture,' which is English-

oriented. We have one team-teaching class in OCB and one in Writing per week.

I am conducting an experimental plan to put grammar instruction in OCB. There are two reasons for this attempt. One of the essential part of the approach I suggested in the previous chapter is in communicative method. In order to place communicative activities at the center of the procedure, OCB is not a bad choice. The other reason is concerned with the constraint of time. Systematic structural instruction needs two classes per week if it is going to cover essential items in one year, which is desirable for further learning the next two years. Systematic structural instruction in English I is not realistic, since it is difficult to give two classes out of three. The non-team-teaching class out of the two in OCB, is less communicative and involves grammar explanation and practices in a less communicative way, aside from listening comprehension activities. This class is used to supplement the team-teaching class, which cannot cover all points in its limited time.

2.2 The choice and arrangement of structural items

It is crucial to decide which item to teach, and in what order, due to the limited time. The yearly plan four years ago, when I tried a similar attempt (but much less systematically), was made to follow the textbook (Oral Communication Course B Listen, Kiri-hara) from the first chapter, picking out a few structural items in the text or expressions

related to the situation after the listening comprehension activity, and developing communicative activities which used the items or expressions. The lack of a system had to be compensated for by studying outside the classroom. In order to avoid the inefficiency resulting from this, my plan this year bases the yearly procedure on language structure and chooses the text to fit it. Since the topical arrangement is basically not systematized, it is easier to pick out texts regardless of the order appearing in the textbook (Expressways: Oral Communication B, Kairyudo).

The language items arranged in my plan are as follows :

Sentence pattern
Interrogative sentence
Tense
Auxiliary verb
Voice
Infinitive
Gerund
Particle
Comparison
Relative
Subjunctive mood

These are chosen in terms of frequency in spoken English and importance in communication, and arranged roughly from structurally basic to complicated, following the arrangement of the grammar book used for senior high school students Dual Scope (Suken)²⁾. The chosen items have a structural system, so the items can accept generalization and logic. Because they are lists of items rather than a system, and

difficult for generalization and logical explanation, conjuncture, articles, preposition, etc. are omitted. For example, conjuncture can be learned better from reading input. I made one change in the order of the items appearing in the book. Interrogative is placed second in my plan, though it appears much later in the book. Interrogative includes rather structurally complicated items such as indirect interrogative, but because of its communicative uses it is more important for my plan.

2) Every student at Kanazawa Fuzoku has Dual Scope as a reference text. They don't read it in class, but consult it after class for further descriptions of the grammatical items they have learned.

2.3 Classroom procedure

The procedure for a class of 50 minutes consists of three stages :

- (1) Presentation
- (2) Isolation and explanation
- (3) Practice

A division of a worksheet for one class will be attached at the end of the discussion of each stage. The linguistic goal of the class is to let the students learn "should have p.p.."

- (1) Presentation

I begin by presenting the class with a text in which the target grammatical structure appears. The aim of the presentation is to get the learner to perceive the structure---its form and meaning---and the situation or context in which the structure appears. The presented item is usually new, but if it has

been previously learned, the aim is to remind the learner of the structure.

In my plan the presentation serves as a listening comprehension activity as well ; therefore, the text is presented in an aural form. It reflects the fundamental framework of OCB, that speaking and listening should be above reading and writing. The advantage of the combination of the grammar presentation and listening comprehension is this : it is communicative in that the learner pays attention to meanings or messages instead of language forms. It makes it possible to avoid presenting the text just for a grammatical purpose. Students are more likely to find interest in activities with non-linguistic goals than in those purely linguistic.

I predict that there will be a criticism that meaning-orientation may turn the learner's attention from language form and deprive it of a role as part of linguistic presentation. But this part functions well enough by just presenting the text including the structure, as the next stage play the role. At the first stage, it is more important to focus on the meaning and grasp the context surrounding the structure. For the later activities develop on the basis of the understanding at this stage.

The presentation is in the form of tape-listening, or presentation by an ALT and a JTE. Basically, material taken from the OCB textbook serves for the presentation, but when it is not satisfactory, which sometimes happens, I have to find something else from which I can develop activities more easily.

Below is the first part of the worksheet, followed by the tape-script of the text used in the presentation. Before starting, the students are given the meaning of the new words by listening to the ALT's definitions. Students fill in the blank spaces and comprehension is verified by checking the answers to the task.

Worksheet 1-1 with the tapescript

1 LISTENING

Word hints customer
instruction
refund

A customer came to the 1_____to 2_____and get 3_____back. She said it had been 4_____when she 5_____it. It turned out that she had not 6_____the instruction, "7_____." Therefore, she shop doesn't have to 8_____.

C : Excuse me. I'd like to return a dress I bought here

S : Certainly Do you have your receipt?

C : Yes, right here.

S : Was something wrong with the dress, ma'am?

C : Yes The quality is terrible. It fell apart when I washed it.

S : Oh my!

C : I demand a refund.

S : Did you wash it in hot water or cold water.

C : Hot water. So what?

S : Oh, you were supposed to wash it in cold water. I'm sorry but I can't give you a refund.

C : But I only wash it once

S : Yes, but it says right here, "Wash only in cold water "

C : Are you saying you won't give me a refund?

S : I'm afraid not.

C : That's it. I'm never coming to this store again.

S : Sorry, ma'am. You should have been more careful.

(2) Isolation and explanation

At this stage we move away from the context, and focus, temporarily, on the grammatical items themselves : what they sound like, what they mean, how they

function ; in short, what rules govern them. The objective is that the learner should understand these various aspects of the structure. It is sometimes necessary to use Japanese to give explanations, translations and generalizations. This stage shouldn't take much time. Where the given structure is difficult, I focus on a few important points and leave the further description for the non-team-teaching class. On the other hand, where the structure is simple or not new, a short reminder will be sufficient, or omitted altogether.

This stage includes 'sentence repetition.' The ALT reads several sentences picked out from the text, including one with the focused structure, and the students repeat each sentence in chorus. It may precede or follow the teachers' explanation. Preceding repetition aims to draw attention to the structural form, while repetition after explanation familiarizes the students with the structure. Which to choose depends on the structure.

In the example, I picked out three sentences from the text for repetition---which are underlined in the tape-script on this page, one of which, included the focused structure, 'should have p.p.' This was new to my students, but I put the repetition first. The structural hint on the worksheet would help them at least catch the structural form. After the repetition, I gave the meaning, the structural rules, and stressed particularly the difference between 'should have p.p.' and 'should,' a previously learned form. The

former represents 'regret', while the latter 'advice.' It is useful to direct the learner's attention to the differences or similarities in structure, meaning or function between the new items and previously learned items. In bringing attention to the similarities and differences, it helps instill proper usage and avoid confusion.

worksheet 1-2

2 REPETITION

3 EXPRESSION

should have p.p.

should

(3) Practice

This section, which discusses the major part of the procedure, is going to be much longer than the first two.

The objective of this stage is to have the learner understand the rules governing the structure and to absorb them. This stage involves two types of exercise : linguistic and communicative. The former deals with the manipulation of forms without relation to meaning or situation outside the isolated sentences. Its role is to make sure that the learner understand the explanation, and to get him prepared for the more communicative activities to follow. It may be assigned as homework, or can be entirely omitted if it is not necessary.

The communicative practice is the main

focus of the instruction procedure. Communicative activities in general refer to a rather large scope from that quite close to real communication to what Littlewood(1981) classifies as a 'Quasi-communicative activity'. Let us review what 'communicative activities' are before discussing the third stage of my plan. The five requirements summarized by Ellis(1982) will help us ; (1) the purpose lying in communication, (2) focus on content rather than on structure, (3) information gap between the speaker and the listener, (4) negotiation of meaning, (5) choice of language by the speaker. How communicative an activity is depends on how much it meets the five requirements. If the goal is spontaneous speech in unplanned discourse, the learner needs to take part in highly communicative activities which fully satisfy these five requirements. They may not necessarily fit our present objective. What we need are activities that are at the same time communicative and linguistic, which help the learner acquire the proper usage of the structures.

We are going to give some consideration to how to design successful practices from both sides respectively.

Several communicative frameworks should be built into the activities. The most important framework is that the activities have non-linguistic goals. Thus, two kinds of objectives are combined, the non-linguistic one being the main focus, while participants are aware of the secondary, that is, the linguistic one. The major objective may be,

for example, to solve a problem, to explore a situation, or to get to know each other, behind which lies a secondary one, to use particular structural items correctly. By taking part in such activities, the learner concentrates not so much on language forms as on meanings, which are likely to be more interesting and motivating. The learner understands that they are learning grammar as a means of communication. In the classroom the teacher gives only the major objective in the form of task goals. Students are expected to use the focused structures correctly without the secondary objective being mentioned.

I hope another example(Worksheet 2) will be helpful. The grammar focus of this lesson is 'simple present tense'. The task is a game of 'guessing occupations'. It is performed as group work. Everyone has the same work sheet and each group member is given a copy with a list of several different occupations on it. The directions are "One member gives clues to a job on his list. The others guess what the job is. Change roles in turn." There should be no mention of 'simple present tense' until the end of the activity, when the teacher gives a brief check on grammatical accuracy.

Worksheet 2

4 GROUP WORK

	SEX	TALK	WEAR	USE/NEED	DO	OCCUPATION
1						

The importance of 'information gap', the second framework, has been emphasized. The transmission of new ideas from one participant to another occurs in most real-life language based transactions. I am not going to go into the detailed analysis of the many types of information gaps, but will stress how they serve as an initial setting of communicative tasks in my plan.

Communicative activities start with information gap, that is, the state of partiality of information among participants. It may be that a piece of information is given to some participants while not to others, or that every participant has different experiences or opinions about a given subject. By asking and answering questions, they share ideas and move toward the goal. A good effect results from this process, to add a feeling of purpose, challenge, and authenticity which improve learner interest.

The learner's choice of language is the third essential framework. I design the tasks

to allow the students to choose their own words. Even if the basic structural framework of the response is prescribed in advance, the learner's motivation to participate rises significantly if they are allowed to choose the actual 'content' words to use. More important is the choice of ideas, which leads to 'negotiation of meanings', an essential part of verbal transactions which develops spontaneous speech in unplanned discourse. The choice may be completely uncontrolled in some tasks like free conversations, but some inflict more controlled choice, like most games. Uncontrolled tasks are desirable because they can draw from the learner varied and original responses, but more controlled activities are easier to manage in the classroom, particularly when the learner has difficulty producing certain patterns and needs some drill, and effective enough if the activities are equipped with game-like tension and interesting content.

Let us move into the structural side of how to design successful practices. We should remember that the linguistic goal is secondary in the activities so the teacher should not tell the learner about grammar once the communicative practices begin, though they participate with the secondary goal in mind.

The most sensitive linguistic part of task design is how difficult the production should be. The learner gets discouraged if the task is too easy or too difficult. Some degree of difficulty can motivate the learner. Difficulty may lie in language forms, an

example being 'should have p.p.', or in the use and functions of structures though the structures themselves are rather simple, such as 'simple present tense'. Both can happen together (subjunctive mood). As I suggested in the section of 'isolation and explanation', understanding the difference between two or more confusing items is an effective way for the learner to grasp the exact usage of structures. Therefore, tasks will be helpful if they offer the opportunities for the learner to choose the correct structures. Intermediate learners will find learning value in such tasks.

Communicative activities supply opportunities for the repeated use of learned structures. This so-called 'spiral' method helps acquisition of the structures. We should not neglect that the learner is always likely to use the same simple expressions in free language choice. It ensures the necessity of planning in order to make the spiral method take effect.

For the last framework of the linguistic side, I am going to look at 'feedback' and accuracy check. Basically, I agree with the communicative concept of feedback : All the feedback participants gain is from other participants in the form of success or failure of message transmission. It is actually impossible to check every learner production during performance. What the teacher can do during activities is to move around the class and help students when necessary. The problem is that it often leaves learner production unchecked.

In order to make up for the lack of accuracy feedback, I try to finish the activities by letting volunteers present their performance in front of class. Besides being a checking device, this serves as a good consolidation and reminds the students of what they have learned. In game-like activities, it is sufficient just to see whether the students have found solutions or correct answers. Even then I try not to forget to give any last comments concerning the structures they have learned in the lesson.

The best way to make a check may be writing : it doesn't stop learner performance and gives them visual feedback. Unfortunately, it can't be done every time due to time constraints.

Next we come to the last division of Worksheet 1(1-3 and 1-4). This section consists of two parts, the first being a more linguistic practice and the second a communicative practice. The first task asked the students to give advice or state regret about five problems the ALT presented. They were expected to use 'should' or 'should have p.p.'. They wrote down their responses and volunteers presented them in front of the class to the ALT. The ALT or I gave comments on each presentation and corrected them, or gave better expressions if necessary. This interaction supplied an opportunity for the students to listen to their classmates performance and to learn other expressions.³⁾

The last task was supposed to be an active interaction among the students, in

which they told their problems to each other, and gave and receive responses from others. If there is not enough time to do it all, the task can be shortened : the students write down their problems, the teacher collects the sheets and give them back after shuffling them. The students then write their responses, and the teacher recollect and give them back after checking expressions.

Worksheet 1-3 with the ALT's problems

4 PRACTICE(1)
1 _____
2 _____
3 _____
4 _____
5 _____

- 1 I left my bag in the classroom. I went back to get it but I couldn't find it.
- 2 I have headache, but I am about to take a test.
- 3 My girlfriend just broke up with me.
- 4 A : I missed the beginning part of the soccer game between Japan and Croatia.
B : What happened?
A : I didn't read the timetable in the newspaper carefully. I thought it would start at 10 o'clock.
- 5 I reserved a ticket for the game between Japan and Jamaica at Kinki Tourists, but I couldn't get it after all. My friends who reserved at JTB got one.

Worksheet 1-4

5 PRACTICE(2)
Your problem(s)
<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 100%;"></div>
Advice or Regret from others
<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; width: 100%;"></div>

Allow me to add one more point concerning learner interest. Communicative activities are risky in that results---success or failure---become obvious in the participant's attitudes during their performance, and the results influence their motivation to perform in the next lesson. If an activity fails, there may be several reasons : low motivation in the learners ; lack of skill on the part of the teacher ; undeveloped relationships among the learners, or the teacher and the learners. Many problems, however, lie in the activity itself : (1) it may be too difficult or too easy ; (2) the learners may not understand why they are doing a particular task ; or (3) it may just be boring. These three often overlap to some degree, but it is easy to talk from separate viewpoints. We have already dealt with the first possibility from the structural point of view. The non-linguistic contents also should not be too difficult or too easy, which should be involved in the third problem. The second problem often happens since it takes long time to acquire good skills in speaking and listening in a foreign language, and it discourages the learner from finding learning value in every short lesson. Communicative activities in my plan can be a help because the learners know a short-term goal beside a long-term goal. They know they are doing practice at least for learning particular structures. Of course this will not help much if the content is boring.

Interest in the activities themselves is the most important factor influencing the participant's motivation. It depends on the

technique of offering tasks and topic, which is more important. The importance of the topic varies. If the activity is a discussion on a controversial subject, the topic must be one that holds the learner's attention. On the other hand, a game-like activity where emphasis is on problem-solving, for example, provides a feeling of pleasurable tension and its subject matter becomes less important. Such activities encourage even shy learners, while sacrificing the learner's originality in production'. 'Ranking', which reflects the participant's values, is a useful technique which is encouraging and allows for learner originality. In every type, ranking and game-like activities included, the better the topic, the more likely the activity will succeed.

What is a good topic? It is something the learner knows about so well that it causes definite positive or negative responses. Or it is something they would like to find out more about and can do so through participation in the task. It is something which stimulates their imagination or curiosity. Or something they are already familiar or personally involved with and would like to tell others about. What I bear in mind in choosing the topic is to let my students feel comfortable in using English. My preference is in the subjects concerned with personal viewpoints or experiences, those of local interest (about school life or hometown), and those involving what they have learned from TV or newspapers (famous celebrities or current events and happenings). When it is difficult to apply such subjects as a topic focus, I try at least to

put them in the task material. In the 'definition task', I added recently fashionable vocabulary such as 'amura' or 'asshi-kun' to the task list.

3) Takahashi studied the effect of this process and concluded that corrections on a representative's mistakes could cause others to pay attention to the mistakes whether they were presenters or listeners

2.4 Problems and suggestions

I have to mention two problems at the end of this chapter. The major difficulty is in finding materials for presentation. I hope to design the whole procedure so that it will have one story, or at least every stage will be connected. It is not easy to find texts suitable for this plan in the authorized coursebook, but various materials are available now, and we can choose from a variety.

Also, activities in my plan is restricted by the linguistic purpose. Free transaction is limited, but the whole production is not completely controlled by the use of particular structures. As free discussion is difficult if language use is controlled, it would be easy to isolate it and design a whole lesson with it as a main focus. It would be better to insert in my yearly plan a lesson whose main focus is free discussion without any particular linguistic learning. If we would like bigger projects which take a long time to complete, those activities should be left for the next year's planning after going through the essential structural instructions.

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